

WHAT HAPPENS AT AN ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE?

The objective is to reach a decision on behalf of the Church as to whether to send a candidate for training for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work. This is achieved by reaching a careful and balanced view of a candidate's potential for ministry in the United Reformed Church and advice about appropriate training. Reaching such a decision is easier said than done, because subjective and personal elements in any assessment or person cannot be eradicated and should in fact find their place. The question 'Can I see this person as my minister or CRCW?' is a valid one. However, it is important that a judgement on a person's suitability for ministry is more than just intuitive and is determined by an appraisal of a candidate's potential to display and develop qualities and skills deemed necessary for ministry.

The criteria for ministry have been a matter for continuing debate for the Assessment Board. General Assembly in 1996 agreed Criteria for Assessment. The Core Competencies for Church Related Community Work Ministry (May 2015) and the Marks of Ministry for Ministers of Word and Sacraments (May 2019) form the basis of this assessment.

The Assessment Panel at an Assessment Conference is drawn from the Assessment Board appointed by the General Assembly. It includes experienced ordained, commissioned and lay members, those with particular gifts in counselling, personnel management, theological perception, those with personal knowledge of various styles of ministry, community development work and from differing theological stances. A panel will normally consist of 4 members, balanced as far as possible in the various categories. Each candidate will have 2 in-depth interviews with members of the panel working in pairs. The task is demanding, searching and at times deeply moving, and assessors are all too aware of the responsibility laid upon them.

The panel receives all the paperwork in the candidate's application. Interviewers read these papers before meeting the candidate so that the interview can be conducted in the light of the individual's concerns and personal statement.

Interviews take account of previous experience in the church and the community, the circumstances of a call, a candidate's devotional life, expectation of future ministry and views about the training they feel they need. The application form and various references, including a report from the synod form the basis of discussion, but the conference provides the opportunity to go much deeper. Often the candidates are faced with questions about their faith or themselves which have never occurred to them before, and it is clearly a learning process for them, let alone the assessors. For candidates for Church Related Community Work the interviews will include a 10 minute presentation on their understanding of faith producing actions which make a positive difference to people and their communities.

Personal Development A professionally trained person in the field of Personal Development assists the Assessment Conference through appropriate tests and conversation in order to help evaluate potential and identify particular issues.

Group Exercises All candidates take part in two group exercises which help to demonstrate their awareness of current issues, pastoral sensitivity and the ability to work collaboratively.

The Education and Learning Board at an Assessment Conferences consists of representatives of the Resource Centres for Learning and the Education and Learning Committee. Board members meet with each candidate to discuss the training programme appropriate for the ministry for which the candidate is applying. The Education and Learning Board plays no part in formulating the recommendations of the Assessment Board. The following Code of Practice has been agreed by the General Assembly:

(i) The Assessment Conferences shall take careful account of any wishes expressed by a candidate.

Factors to be taken into account will include: -

- (a) The Resource Centre for Learning (RCL) milieu which will best enable the student to develop personally and spiritually,
- (b) The kind of course most suitable;
- (c) The size and balance of the student body at any particular time,
- (d) The final choice is without prejudice to the admission procedures of the college.

A subsequent change of Resource Centre at the request of the candidate will only be recommended if good reasons can be clearly stated to all concerned.

(ii) In the interest of all concerned, a candidate may contact or visit any of the three RCLs before the Assessment Conference.

Pastoral care is exercised by a chaplain, who is not part of the assessment process. The chaplain's role is to lead worship and be available to candidates for support and debriefing. The assessors are very much aware of the role of synods both before and after the Assessment Conference in ensuring that pastoral support is offered to all candidates, whether or not they are commended for training.

Worship is an important part of the Assessment Conference and is led by the chaplain.

During 2020, because of restrictions on movement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Assessment Conferences have been held online via Zoom. The Assessment Board has kept to the process as described above as far as is possible. Instead of two group exercises there will be one presentation and one group exercise.

The Assessment Board may decide to invite the candidate to return to the next in-person Assessment Conference.

*Person responsible for editing document: The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith
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